

BLACK & PINK

March 2010 Newsletter

Dear friends,

It has been wonderful to get your responses to the last issue of *Black and Pink*! It is my privilege to work with a group of people on the outside as well as with you on the inside to bring about support and love for gay, lesbian, bisexual, same-gender loving, transgender, and gender non-conforming prisoners. A number of newsletters came back because some people have been released; it is a great joy to know that as we fight for everyone's freedom there are those who get theirs in the process. It has also been humbling to read your supportive letters of Paula after reading her story. One of the purposes of this newsletter is to provide an avenue where people who are locked up can realize that others share in the same story and that no one is alone. While it is heart breaking to read of your suffering, it is inspiring to read of your survival, and I am gracious to be included in the work to abolish this system of violence.

At the end of this month, Jewish people around the world will be celebrating Passover. This incredible story of resistance can inspire the resistance of queer and transgender prisoners today. If you pick up a Bible and open to the Book of Exodus you can read the story of the Israelites gaining their freedom from slavery, a liberation story vital for prisoners in the United States today. In many ways the story of Pharaoh's heart hardening can feel familiar for many prisoners who have been denied parole time and time again or who felt no mercy from the judge or jury who sentenced them to suffer behind the prison walls. Prisoners, and their loved ones, wail and call out for justice, just as the Israelites did thousands of years ago in the Exodus story.

The Exodus story continues as God sends plagues onto the people, the tenth plague being the death of the first born. The Israelites were finally allowed to flee from their oppressors, though the Pharaoh's armies chased after them. After the Israelites went across the parted waters of the Red Sea, the waves crashed down, crushing the approaching army. The Israelites cheered in the defeat of their enemy, but God chastised them, as even oppressors are part of God's creation. However, I would suggest that when people who have been held in bondage, in slavery, in prison for so long, it is impossible not to celebrate at the destruction of those who were causing the oppression. A theology of oppressed people does not leave aside the fantasy of retribution for the suffering they incurred. A theology of liberation for a mother watching her child be sentenced by a judge will allow her to fantasize about waters crashing down on the courthouse, drowning those who prosecute and imprison her child. The same theology that challenges institutions to release their grip on oppressing individuals can also allow marginalized people to pray in their righteous anger, as it can foster the strength to survive. The theology of the oppressed and the theology of the privileged are rooted in different experiences and thus are expected to be different and even contradictory at times. The universal aim of theology need not equalize the approach of all individuals entering into it. The universal aim of theology may be to afflict some while comforting others, until the universal community of mutual aid and love is established. It has been said by many, those with power do not give it up willingly, it must be demanded and taken by the oppressed.

So as the Passover season approaches, I encourage everyone to find strength in the story of resistance and to recognize that even as those who oppress are indeed part of Creation, the interconnected web of all existence, fantasies of their destruction are healthy and important to survival. The Exodus story gave strength to African people held in slavery within the United States and has given strength to many movements for freedom around the world. This story of resistance can also belong to you as we wail and cry out for freedom for all prisoners and justice for queer and transgender people locked behind walls. And though feelings of revenge can be natural, it is similar feelings that lead to some people's support of the prison industrial complex. As we all journey towards love and justice, reflect on the rebuke from God to the Israelites, for indeed we are all part of creation. In the end this is all bigger than revenge, this is about justice, which involves holding oppressors accountable and recognizing the humanity within oppressors.

It has been said, "Once there were no prisons, that day will soon come again."

Love,

Jason Lydon



Andy's Story

I was admitted to the state's reception center on July 10, 2008. Everyone who enters the prison system in this state has to go there first to determine what "camp" they will be placed in. Shortly after I was placed on the housing unit, rumors got started that I may be gay. Yeah, NOT good. Fast forward about 3 weeks: Most of the "straight" inmates saw fit to sexually harass me. I wish I could say the Crazy CO's did something about it, but the truth of the matter is this: THEY ENCOURAGED THE HARRASSMENT. Again, not cool. I put up with that until November 2008. I was then transferred to my first "camp" as they are called here in this state. It was pretty much the same story, except 10 times as worse. I was harassed on a daily basis by both the other inmates and some of the officers. I was told by several other staff that since I was in prison that I would "have to deal with it." I'm not one to be physically violent unless my life is in real danger, but I can tell you from first hand experience, that there are people here that are not afraid to clonk someone just for looking at them. During my stay at that "camp" I was assaulted 3 times just for the fact that I was gay. The offenders that were involved got what I refer to as a "slap on the hand and don't do that again junior" type of punishment. By that I mean they basically got told not to do that again. Now, had that been me or another one of my homosexual brothers, we would have, at the minimum, been put in the hole for 30 days and lost 30 days of good time.

Fast forward again to December of 2009, when I was transferred to the "camp" where I am currently. I THOUGHT I would be safer here. Well, I was severely wrong. In the short amount of time I have been here, things have gone from bad to worse. Case in point, I continue to be harassed because I am openly gay. The CO's are no better here. If anything, they are worse, except for a select few. In January of this year, I sustained a groin area injury in the middle of the night for some mysterious reason. I went to see the doctor two days later. Now, as a result of the doctor's report to my counselor and the treatment director, they are convinced that I was raped. Let me make a few things clear before I continue:

1. I am housed alone because of who I am as a person
2. This injury happened around 3:30 am while I was sleeping

You may be wondering how in the world it was possible for me to be raped then. Well, wonder no more, because I WAS NOT RAPED. My counselor and the treatment director both admitted to me face to face that they are discriminating against me due to my sexual orientation. I know that I am not the only one in this camp who is being discriminated against. My good friend here is in a similar situation as I am. We are both on single cell housing due to the fact that we are both openly gay. Yet, they let other openly gay offenders live with a cell-mate. I am currently going through the grievance system to right these wrongs.

Brothers and Sisters in the community, I urge you and your friends to take a stand against this injustice in prison systems. I know that there are countless other people in the prison systems in this country that can relate to my story. It is time that we, as a community, put a stop to this unfair treatment just because of who we are. To take a line from Jason Lydon if I may, "It has been said that once there were no prisons, that day will soon come again." Peace and Love.

B&P

Rose and Butterfly

It don't matter what you think about me,
When I look in the mirror I like who I see.
Never again shall I hide,
Because I am proud of who I am inside.
So from this day forth I shall hold my head high,
For I am beautiful as a rose and free as a butterfly!



~Amanda Washburn

PLWA

How can you sit and say, I'm not in pain
When you're sheltered and I'm covered by rain
My life and body changed by unknown activities
Tears Flow as my Body's Attack
How do I cope with this unknown Fate
Will I grow old or is it too late
I'm confused and want someone to talk to
About my health yet everyone's Selfish
Worried only of their Self
At Night I talk to God, layin' on my Background
But how do I hear Answers from A Voice that doesn't talk back,
I Try to gain knowledge on my Situations, But the prison tries to set Limitations
So where do I turn, where do I start,
Only I understand the Fears within my heart.

~Douglas Ward

Andrew's Story

An excerpt from a letter Andrew sent to Black & Pink

I'm in here with no inside or outside support. Everybody that meant something to me the most, including my most loved and cherished ones, all left and disowned me because of my sexual orientation. Because I'm homosexual. So I'm in here with no one to communicate with or talk to. Mail, family visits, and support is very essential to an inmate's sanity. All this plays a crucial and integral part to an inmate's well being. To be honest with you, I'm like one of the only inmates in here who gets nothing to look forward to. I get no mail, no visits, and I've got no inside or outside support. All of this is compounded with me being in solitary confinement. I've been here for a couple months, and I've got a couple more to go. When you're in solitary confinement you're in your cell 23 hours of a day and sometimes 24 if it's cold outside. Your light is on all day. If you try to cover them up, they'll either extend your time, or that gives them the justification to put you in mechanical in-cell restraints. They can also put you on a food diet called nutriloaf. You're better off eating dog food than that. You go to a yard that's analogous to a dog cage. They asked a psychiatrist about the harmful effects of solitary confinement, he said, "Light illuminated 24 hours a day causes physical and psychological harm and creates other psychological effects." He said, "Illumination makes sleep difficult and exacerbates the harm." He said, "You start to deteriorate with a lack of sunshine, fresh air, and exercise." To be honest with you, jail don't care if you're blind, crippled, or crazy. All they want is your body and if you're not strong your mind and soul will follow. Another thing I want you to realize is that anyone who is in their cell every day all day is bound to acquire many stress related problems. These problems can and will contribute to physical and mental illnesses. A lot of people don't realize it but I've seen isolation take a man down faster than a 350 pound linebacker. This is the reason I've lost 20 pounds.

B&P



News Update from Maine

Many groups in Maine who are concerned with the inhumanity of solitary confinement are pushing for new legislation that would change the way solitary confinement works. Here is the explanation from the Maine Civil Liberties Union:

“Solitary confinement is an extreme sanction with the potential to cause severe harm, both physically and psychologically. It exacerbates existing mental illness and induces mental illness in otherwise healthy individuals. The overuse and abuse of solitary confinement makes us all less safe by thwarting rehabilitation in prison and successful re-entry into our communities after release. The overwhelming majority of people in prison will someday get out, and the type of person they are when they return to our communities is strongly influenced by the treatment they receive in prison. Everyone, even those in prison, deserves to be treated like a human being. Solitary confinement is a bad investment – there are safer, more economical and more humane alternatives. The price per prisoner in high security segregation units like the SMU is 2-3 times higher than in ordinary prisons. Prolonged solitary confinement as practiced in Maine lacks adequate due process as there are currently no clear criteria for transferring out of administrative or high risk segregation.”

The legislation that the groups are proposing would do the following (also according to the Maine Civil Liberties Union):

“LD 1611 establishes oversight, accountability and due process for prisoners subjected to solitary confinement in Maine’s prisons.

-Limits the Use of Solitary Confinement to 45 days unless the prisoner has committed or attempted to commit a violent act that did or may have resulted in serious injury or death, an act connected to a sexual assault, escape or attempted escape.

-Provides Due Process for anyone held in solitary confinement for more than 45 days by requiring a hearing, periodic reviews, and a plan for each prisoner specifying what he must do to gain release.

-Creates Oversight by engaging the Board of Visitors as an internal watchdog to ensure implementation of the law and review of prisoner complaints.

-Ensures Prisoners with Serious Mental Illness Are Not Placed in Solitary by prohibiting placement of seriously mentally ill prisoners in the SMU and requiring weekly mental health evaluations of those inmates confined in solitary.

-Bans Brutal Forms of Restraint by prohibiting use of the restraint chair and four-point restraints and limiting use of other forms of restraint.

-Bars Punitive Exile by allowing transfer of Maine prisoners only to those out-of-state facilities that conform to Maine’s humane standards of treatment.”

Black & Pink says: We applaud Maine's forward movement on this issue! As many of us know, one day in solitary is too much. Wouldn't it be great if we got rid of solitary completely?

B&P

To Paula,

You're in my heart. I love your strength. I love you. You are beautiful. You are a woman. I hope in the future one day to shake your hand, give you a hug and kiss you upon your forehead and both cheeks and let you see the tears on my face. To let you know how much you and everyone like us, means to me.

With love, Cameron "Cali" Willett

7 Years

7 years these walls have held me
7 years since I was free
I miss my friends
I miss their hearts love and beauty
I miss their truth and soul for it never bends
I am here split between through blind eyes never seen
A lover, a friend to women in this man's prison
7 years I still stand beside themselves
7 years I've been an enemy to staff and prison men.
I am a fighter for those who are demeaned
I have been labeled "fag lover" by the community Brand
Because I love you who are true
Because you do not lie and will not hide
Because I'm here next to you through and throughout
I have been jumped, stabbed, and branded
All because I understand!
For 7 years and I continue to walk with you hand in hand

~Cameron "Cail" Willett

In International News...

Source: PinkNews (Online): News, Reviews, and Comment from Europe's Largest Gay News Service
“Italy is to open its first prison specially for trans inmates. The building, a former halfway house for women, is in the town of Empoli in Tuscany. It will open in late March. It will house 30 prisoners who are currently being held in a special section of a prison outside Florence. Trans prisoners, especially those transitioning from male to female, can often find their treatment postponed while in jail. In the US, there have been several cases of inmates taking legal action after being refused hair removal treatment or state-funded surgery. Authorities are reluctant to house them in women’s prisons and they often have to be housed separately in men’s prisons. Maria Pia Giuffrida, a detention administration official, told reporters that the building was 'very satisfactory', news agency Sapa reported. The move was welcomed by LGBT groups and Vladimir Luxuria, a former MP and Italy’s best known trans advocate. She said that such prisoners were often punished for their trans status along with their crimes, adding: It’s a question of dignity”

A note from *Black & Pink*: Given the extreme amounts of violence transpeople experience in prison, it makes sense that people may feel safer in a specifically trans prison. We don't intend to make anyone feel guilty or judged for desiring a safer experience in prison- everyone deserves safety, wherever they are. While we understand the desire and need to create safety for transgender prisoners, building more prisons and creating more prison beds will not make anyone safer. A more comprehensive solution could be about decriminalizing the lives of transgender people, rather than fitting them better into other systems of oppression, like the prison system. As soon as there are prison beds available, the system works to fill them. This will lead to more people being incarcerated; we can fight for the release of people from prison, not the confinement of more people. If this is about recognizing identity, while we still have prisons, transgender people should be placed in the gendered population where they feel safest. If this really is a question about dignity, we should not be imprisoning people in the first place.

A Rose and A Wish

A rose to say you're thought of
In a fond and special way
And a wish that you're much better
And happiness is in view
Just the way it ought to be
For someone as nice as you.

~Willie L. Barnes



Art by Reggie West

Golden Heart

Yes, you've seen the things I once saw and walked those streets I've walked before. You've smelled the smells, heard the sounds of places I can walk no more. The clack of boot heels on the streets, the cowboy hats, the heated air are now replaced with steel on steel. I search for you but you're not here. I see things now you've never seen, know the predators, know the prey. I hear the echoes, feel the screams, swim through the tears that fall each day. The razor wire reflects the sun now, the tortured cries forever ring. If you were here you would cry too and hope for better things. While you would send high desert to me, the heated streets, the bricks, the stone, I could never send my world, for it is mine alone. A golden heart, so strong and pure, you brought me hope, you brought me love, you came along and filled my life. For that, I thank the Gods above.

~Jasmine

B&P

Party Boys

You are the Party Boys
Always ready with your toys
No matter where the event
The Party Boys will spare no expense
The Ball has started and they're not here
Don't you fret or be in dismay
When the time comes they'll be on display
Without a doubt they'll be fashionably late
As we all stand and wait
Through some kind of Hocus-Pocus
Suddenly they arrive and become the main focus
Now the party is alive
Music pumping hard as the DJ spins
Everyone dancing to their own beat
Sweat pouring as the temperature rises within
Soon we all collapse as we climax in ecstasy
Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall
The Party Boys are forever on call
So if there is a gathering to be held
You can bet, the Party Boys will know
All to be told

~Umberto Rose



Hope



Doom and despair, agony and loneliness,
they were my days, and my companions for years.
Rage consumed my soul.
My mind screamed for a way to be heard.
Long days locked in a box,
the stigma of a convicted robber,
the case false, but conviction so true.
No one cared what I had to say.
The courts turned a cold shoulder.
I almost fell into the void of no return.
Hope, a word or just a thought?
No, it is a way of life for me,
a chance for justice again in my life.
Black and Pink, who, what, where,
a light at the end of that dark tunnel.
My life started to change.
You gave me a voice to be heard.
I have cast off the shackles of the walking dead.
I have a voice again.
People are listening now.
I am a person again, with a story to be told.
I write and cast off the clouds of darkness.
I am alive again through my published words.
To write heals my soul, patches my torn spirit.
Justice may again be within my grasp.

-Poem and Art by Reggie West

A Message to the Youth: A Letter From Prison

Thus, I first offer my condolences to all the families who have lost loved ones and become victims to the violence. I offer my apology for having been derelict of my duty and responsibility as a young man in not being the guardian, educator, and leader the communities needed in order to be vital and life affirming.

I want to inform you all that it is my goal to counteract the insanity of the destructive mindset and that I do not embrace those who prey upon my people. I want my voice to be heard - let the violence, drug dealing, physical and spiritual abuse of the communities stop.

As a young man, I want it to be known, that I have come to value and recognize that the children need and deserve a safe and secure environment in which to grow and develop, be educated, have access to equal opportunities to excel and become as God intended them to be. I ask that everyone reading or hearing this look at a child - whether at home, school, at play, in church or mosque and consider these words: "I am the African Child"

(continued on next page)

I am the African child

The whole world awaits my coming, all the Earth watches
with interest to see what I shall become. Civilization
hangs in the balance for what I am, the World of tomorrow will be.

I am the African child

You brought me into this world about which I know nothing.
You hold in your hand my destiny. You determine whether I
shall succeed or fail. Give me, I beg you, a world, where
I can walk, Tall and Proud. Train me, as is your duty unto
me. To love myself, and my people. And to build and maintain
a great nation. It is I who proclaim:

I am the African Child

The whole world awaits my coming. I shall not delay it...
For I too, have a dream.

~Reginald West

The Black & *Pink* Newsletter is for, by, and about us queers in prison or formerly incarcerated. Send us your thoughts, articles, poems, ideas, feedback!



Black and *Pink*
c/o Community Church of Boston
565 Boylston St.
Boston, MA 02116

Black and *Pink* primarily is an internet based pen-pal program that lists the names of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer people who are incarcerated and a 25 word (non-sexual) description. We try to publicize the list and encourage "free-world" people to write to prisoners and get involved in the movement to abolish the prison industrial complex. Black and *Pink* is an undefined group of volunteers with connections across the country striving to support people in prison as best as possible. If you would like to be listed on the free pen-pal site please send your information and 25 word bio to the Black and *Pink* address.

As prisoners are not allowed to write to one another in most places, we will not send the pen-pal list out to prisoners. We will, however, print things you want to write and share in this newsletter. If you have ideas of how this newsletter can best be used please write about that as well. The purpose of this newsletter is to serve people who are doing time. Let us know how this can be a more useful resource for you.

In Love and Struggle,

Black and *Pink*